

The View From the Room

A Short Play

By Ken Crost

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Alan Wunderlick:

A very wealthy man in his middle forties. He has always lived a life of privilege.

Margaret Wunderlick:

Alan's wife, late thirties, very attractive and used to the good things in life.

Setting: The bedroom of Alan and Margaret Wunderlick. The set can be as simple as needed as long as it suggests a bedroom.

At Rise: Alan, wearing a tee shirt, a pair of tuxedo pants, black shoes, and suspenders, sits on the bed looking out of the window with a pair of binoculars. We hear the sound of a hair dryer off stage.

MARGARET (off)

The Andersons said they'll pick us up around eight-thirty. I hope they're not late. You know what a space brain Mike can be.

ALAN

Yes, dear, he can be quite absentminded.

(MARGARET enters fluffing her hair and wearing an evening dress.)

MARGARET

I hope no one will remember that I wore this dress to the Steven's anniversary party. I just couldn't find...

(MARGARET sees ALAN with his binoculars.)

ALAN

The dress will be fine, dear.

(MARGARET doesn't respond immediately, but sits on a chair and watches ALAN.)

MARGARET

Alan.

ALAN

Yes?

MARGARET

What are you doing?

ALAN

Watching the people in the apartment building across the way.

MARGARET

Alan, have you lost your mind? You can't do that.

ALAN

Yes, I can, Margaret. I've been doing it for quite some time now. Fascinating how people live their lives.

MARGARET

Give me the binoculars, Alan.

ALAN

Oh, Margaret, what are you going to do them?

MARGARET

Throw them in the garbage, hide them, I don't know.

ALAN

How stupid of you. I'd just go buy another pair. I'm not a child, you know.

MARGARET

Alan, what is the matter with you?

ALAN

Nothing, I'm perfectly fine.

MARGARET

Perfectly fine people don't sit around looking through binoculars into other people's apartments.

ALAN

You can learn a great deal about life by watching other people and how they live. There's an older gentleman who lives in an apartment directly across from ours. He looks to be in his middle sixties. Day after day, and night after night, he sits in his big leather chair and watches his two thousand dollar television set. At night he sits there in his underwear and sips brandy or cognac. Tonight he'll probably open a bottle of Champaign and watch the ball drop at Times Square. Want to take a look?

MARGARET

No, I do not want to look at some old man in his underwear watching television.

ALAN

His life is slipping away from him, Margaret. He doesn't have much time left, and he spends it watching television.

MARGARET

Alan, get dressed, the Andersons will be here soon. We'll talk about this when we get home. You need to get some help.

ALAN

We all need help, Margaret. There's a young woman, not more than twenty-five, who lives across the way by herself. I call her Jill. I give all of the people names. Makes it more interesting. Those apartments are expensive, even the one bedrooms, so she must be doing well to be able to afford to live there.

(He picks up the binoculars
and looks out.)

I think it's that apartment. Can't tell. It's all dark now. She sits by herself most of the time. I've seen her on Saturday nights sitting listening to music, reading, whatever, but always alone. Why would you think a very attractive young woman would spend her life alone?

MARGARET

I don't know, Alan. I don't care.

ALAN

Last Saturday, when I met Jeffrey for lunch downtown, I decided to take a bus instead of a cab. I got on and sat down and started reading. The bus stopped again and Jill got on and sat next to me. She was even more beautiful than I thought. I wanted to ask her why she's always alone, but I didn't. We sat in silence until Oak street, where she got off. I think she might be a model or something.

MARGARET

Thank God you didn't say anything. (Pause) Alan, tomorrow, I'm going to call Doctor Hersh, make an appointment.

ALAN

Aren't you feeling well, Margaret?

MARGARET

For you, Alan. You have to get some help.

ALAN

I will not go see Doctor Hersh.

MARGARET

Then I'll call the police, Alan. I'll turn you in, if you don't stop this insanity.

ALAN

No you won't, Margaret. You will not turn me in to the police.

MARGARET

You're rather sure of yourself.

(ALAN crosses to a table and
picks up a phone.)

ALAN

All right, Margaret, call them. Here's the phone.

(He picks up the phone and
holds it out to her.)

ALAN

Go ahead, take the phone and dial 911 and tell them your
husband is spying on people.

(She doesn't take the phone
and he hangs it up.)

I didn't think so. Do you know why you won't call? Because
if you did, there is a very good chance the scandal would
cause me to lose my position at the bank. I'd have to dig
into our savings to pay for my defense, we'd lose our
gracious apartment, our home in the country, our cars.
Could you live that way, Margaret?

MARGARET

No.

ALAN

I thought not. (Pause) That old man across the way spends
his time watching television, thinking that somehow he is
getting a glimpse of what life is all about. So many of us
think that television gives us a reflection of our lives.
But, the shows on television are funny, sad, exciting, glib,
clever. We see news about earthquakes, floods, wars,
storms, tragedy. And, for some reason, we really think that
is what life is about. But it's not. Do you want to know
what life is really about, Margaret?

MARGARET

No.

ALAN

Pick up these binoculars, Margaret, and look across the way.

MARGARET

No! I will not.

ALAN

That is what life is about. Life is an old man sitting in his underwear, drinking brandy, watching television, and waiting to die. Life is boring for the vast majority of us, it is not a volcano spewing forth ash and fire into the air as we all run for our lives. I watch those people across the way so I don't feel so alone. And that's what that old man should do. Go buy a two hundred dollar pair of binoculars and take a look over here and see what life is really all about. And what would he see, Margaret?

MARGARET

I don't know.

ALAN

You don't know? I'm asking you, what would old Henry see if he picked up his binoculars and looked into our apartment?

MARGARET

I don't know.

ALAN

I'll tell you what he would see, Margaret. He'd see a couple who no longer sleeps together. She has her bedroom and he has his. He'd see her spend hours alone in her room, painting her nails, doing her hair, talking on the phone to her friends about nothing. He'd see two people who meet for breakfast and dinner and have nothing to say to each other. He'd see me at my computer in the evenings and on weekends and think I was doing something very creative. I spent three thousand dollars on that stupid thing and all I do is play games. Our lives are wasting away and we do nothing to try and make things better, because then we'd have to admit

that something was wrong, and we can't do that. We must keep up appearances, isn't that right, Margaret?

MARGARET

Yes, yes dear, we must.

ALAN

I find solace in those empty lives across the way. You will not take that away from me, Margaret.

(The doorbell rings. ALAN and MARGARET sit in silence as the doorbell rings again.)

MARGARET

That must be the Andersons.

ALAN

Yes. You go on, Margaret. I'll stay home tonight.

MARGARET

If you wish.

ALAN

Yes, I wish.

MARGARET

I need to get out, Alan. It's New Years.

ALAN

Tell them my ulcer was acting up; we'll get together next week.

MARGARET

Yes, yes I will.

(MARGARET puts her coat on and crosses to the door. She turns to ALAN.)

MARGARET

Alan, I...

ALAN

Just go, Margaret.

(MARGARET opens the door and exits. ALAN picks up the binoculars, crosses to the window and looks out.)

ALAN

Well, hello, Jill. Happy New Year.

Blackout.

The End.